

Message Text

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ACTION HEW-04

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 NEA-09 IO-10 ISO-00 INR-07 MED-02

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7421

INFO AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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NOFORN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, SWEL, NI, SA

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN CHOLERA DEATHS DURING HAJJ

REF: JIDDA 006

1. NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT HAS OFFICIALLY CONFIRMED DEATH OF 177 NIGERIAN PILGRIMS IN MECCA AS RESULT OF CHOLERA OUTBREAK, BUT CONTINUES TO INSIST THERE WAS NO OUTBREAK OF DISEASE IN NIGERIA BEFORE OR AFTER PILGRIMS LEFT FOR HAJJ. SENIOR NIGERIAN OFFICIAL WHO ACCOMPANIED PILGRIMS HAS GIVEN PUBLIC ASSURANCE THAT "ADEQUATE PREVENTIVE MEASURES HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO IMMUNIZE RETURNING PILGRIMS AGAINST CHOLERA." HE ADDED THAT TOTAL OF 51,761 NIGERIAN PILGRIMS OFFICIALLY RECORDED FOR THIS YEAR'S HAJJ.

2. NIGERIAN PRESS REPORTS OF CHOLERA OUTBREAK IN MECCA HAVE INDICATED DEATH TOLL IN EXCESS OF 400, AND HAVE ATTRIBUTED CAUSE OF OUTBREAK TO POLLUTED WATER DRUNK BY PILGRIMS IN MECCA.

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3. COMMENT: OFFICIAL FMG STATEMENT ON DEATH TOLL SUGGESTS NIGERIAN DESIRE PLAY DOWN STORY OF CHOLERA OUTBREAK, JUST AS FMG HAS REGULARLY SOUGHT TO MINIMIZE INCIDENCE OF DISEASE WITHIN NIGERIA. DESPITE NIGERIAN DENIALS, THERE IS CONSTANT LOW-LEVEL OF ENDEMIC CHOLERA IN MANY PARTS OF COUNTRY, SO THAT DISEASE MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO SAUDI ARABIA BY CARRIER AMONG NIGERIAN PILGRIMS. GIVEN SHORT INCUBATION PERIOD FOR CHOLERA (THREE TO SIX DAYS), HOWEVER, IT APPEARS MORE LIKELY THAT VICTIMS CONTRACTED DISEASE WHILE IN MECCA, WHERE SOURCE OF INITIAL INFECTION SEEMS UNLIKELY EVER TO BE DETERMINED WITH ACCURACY.

4. GIVEN FMG SENSITIVITY ABOUT PRESENCE OF CHOLERA WITHIN NIGERIA, WOULD APPRECIATE ALL RECIPIENTS CAREFULLY RESPECTING NOFORN CAPTION.
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